

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 SNM-02 SSO-00 CIAE-00 INR-07

NSAE-00 INRE-00 JUSE-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 SY-04 TRSE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7286

INFO DEA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 1874

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR CO

SUBJECT: DEA INVOLVEMENT IN INCIDENT BETWEEN DAS AND CUSTOMS

REF BOGOTA 1819

CARACAS FOR DEA

1. AS REPORTED REFTTEL, ON FEB 25 THE COLOMBIAN CUSTOMS NARCOTICS UNIT FLEW TO A CLANDESTINE AIRFIELD LOCATED IN VAUPES DEPARTMENT, 180 MILES SOUTHEAST OF BOGOTA, TO INTERCEPT A MARIJUANA SHIPMENT. THE CUSTOMS UNIT ACTED ON INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE DEA. DEA PAID FOR THE RENTAL OF THE PLANE AND DEA AGENTS GONZALEZ AND MATHEWS PARTICIPATED IN THE OPERATION. UPON ARRIVAL THE PLANE WAS FIRED UPON BY A GROUP OF MEN STATIONED ABOUT THE AIRFIELD. AN EXCHANGE OF AUTOMATIC RIFLE FIRE ENSUED. IT LATER TURNED OUT THAT A DAS CONTINGENT HAD INITIATED THE AUTOMATIC WEAPON FIRE. THE DAS, OPERATING ON INFORMATION ACQUIRED FROM ITS OWN INTELLIGENCE SOURCES, HAD ARRIVED ON THE SCENE PRIOR TO THE CUSTOMS. NO ONE WAS KILLED OR INJURED.

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2. WHEN THE RENTED AIRCRAFT RETURNED FROM VAUPES ON THE EVENING OF FEB 25, THE CHIEF OF DAS, GEN MATAALLANA, WAS WAITING FOR THE DEA AGENTS. AFTER DEMANDING AN EXPLANATION AND EXPRESSING HIS ANGER, MATAALLANA ORDERED SAIC GONZALEZ PLACED UNDER ARREST. GONZALEZ WAS RELEASED A FEW HOURS LATER BY A LESSER OFFICIAL WHEN IT WAS EXPLAINED THAT GONZALEZ HAD DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY.

3. GEN MATAALLANA CALLED GONZALEZ AND MATHEWS TO HIS OFFICE THE FOLLOWING DAY, FEB 26. HE EXPRESSED HIS DISPLEASURE AT AMERICAN AGENTS CONDUCTING NARCOTICS OPERATIONS WITH GOC AGENCIES OTHER THAN DAS WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATION WITH DAS. THE GENERAL ASSERTED THE PRIMARY NARCOTICS ENFORCEMENT RESPONSIBILITY OF THE DAS IN COLOMBIA. HE ADDED THAT IN THIS CASE COLOMBIAN CUSTOMS SERVICE HAD NO JURISDICTION AND DEA HAD NO RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN SUCH AN OPERATION. THE GENERAL STATED HE WOULD MAKE A FORMAL COMPLAINT TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER AGAINST SAIC GONZALEZ AND S/A MATHEWS. HE ALSO STATED HE WOULD LODGE A COMPLAINT AGAINST THE EMBASSY.

4. IN THE LATE AFTERNOON OF FEB 26, THE PRESS SECRETARY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE ISSUED A STATEMENT SIGNED BY BOTH GENERAL MATAALLANA AND RICARDO PALAEZ, THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CUSTOMS SERVICE. IN ESSENCE THE COMMUNIQUE STATED AS FOLLOWS: ON FEB 23 DAS, ACTING ON PRIOR INFORMATION GATHERED FROM ITS OWN SOURCES, CONFISCATED TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY SEVEN BALES OF MARIJUANA. THE DAS HAD CHOSEN FEB 25 AS THE DAY TO TAKE POSSESSION OF AND DESTROY THE SEIZED MARIJUANA. THIS ACTION WAS PROCEEDING NORMALLY WHEN THE CUSTOMS SERVICE, ACTING ON CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FROM THE OFFICE OF NARCOTICS OF THE EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES, INITIATED AN OPERATION WITH THE SAME OBJECTIVE. THIS OPERATION WAS NOT COORDINATED WITH OTHER SECURITY AGENCIES WHICH HAVE JURISDICTION IN THESE MATTERS. AS A RESULT OF THIS LACK OF COORDINATION, THERE WAS AN EXCHANGE OF SHOTS BUT FORTUNATELY NO OFFICIAL PERSONNEL WERE INJURED. THIS INCIDENT WILL
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SERVE TO BETTER THE COORDINATION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT ENTITIES WHICH HAVE AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR REPRESSION OF NARCOTICS TRAFFIC. THE CHIEF OF STATE WILL SOON ISSUE A PRESIDENTIAL DIRECTIVE WHICH WILL FIX CONCRETE RULES TO GUARANTEE SUCH COORDINATION.

5. THE INCIDENT ITSELF RECEIVED FRONT PAGE TREATMENT IN THE NEWSPAPERS. THE PRESS RELEASE HAS ALSO BEEN

PRINTED IN FULL. EL TIEMPO, THE LEADING NEWSPAPER OF BOGOTA, COMMENTED THAT QTE THE COMMUNIQUE, HOWEVER, DID NOT MENTION IN ANY WAY THE REASON FOR THE PRESENCE IN THE INVESTIGATION OF TWO FBI AGENTS WHO WERE TRAVELLING IN THE COMPANY OF THE CUSTOMS AGENTS IN THE TANA AIRCRAFT HK-1511, WHICH WAS HIT BY MORE THAN 35 BULLETS DURING THE EXCHANGE OF FIRE WHICH LASTED ALMOST ONE HOUR UNQTE.

6. COMMENT: GEN MATALLANA HAS CONSISTENTLY SOUGHT TO ACQUIRE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR NARCOTICS ENFORCEMENT FOR THE DAS. WE BELIEVE THIS INCIDENT WILL PROVIDE HIM WITH THE HANDLE HE NEEDS TO ACHIEVE THIS OBJECTIVE. WE EXPECT THAT MATALLANA WILL SEE TO IT THAT AN OFFICIAL PROTEST IS LODGED AGAINST THE DEA AGENTS AND AGAINST THE EMBASSY. WHAT CONSEQUENCES WILL FLOW FROM THIS ADVENTURE ARE DIFFICULT TO PREDICT. IT DEPENDS ON HOW AGGREIVED MATALLANA IS AND WHAT EFFECT HE HAD ON PRESIDENT LOPEZ WITH WHOM HE HAD A PRIVATE AUDIENCE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT. AT A MINIMUM WE EXPECT SEVERE RESTRICTIONS TO BE PLACED ON THE ACTIVITIES OF DEA AGENTS AND THE REQUIREMENT THAT DEA ACQUIRE PRIOR CLEARANCE FROM DAS FOR ANY OPERATIONS OF ANY KIND. WHILE WE REGRET THE COLOMBIAN REACTION, WE ARE RELIEVED THAT EARLIER REPORTS TO THE EFFECT THAT THE GOC WOULD PUBLICLY ATTACK THE EMBASSY AND DEA HAVE THUS FAR BEEN PROVEN FALSE.
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